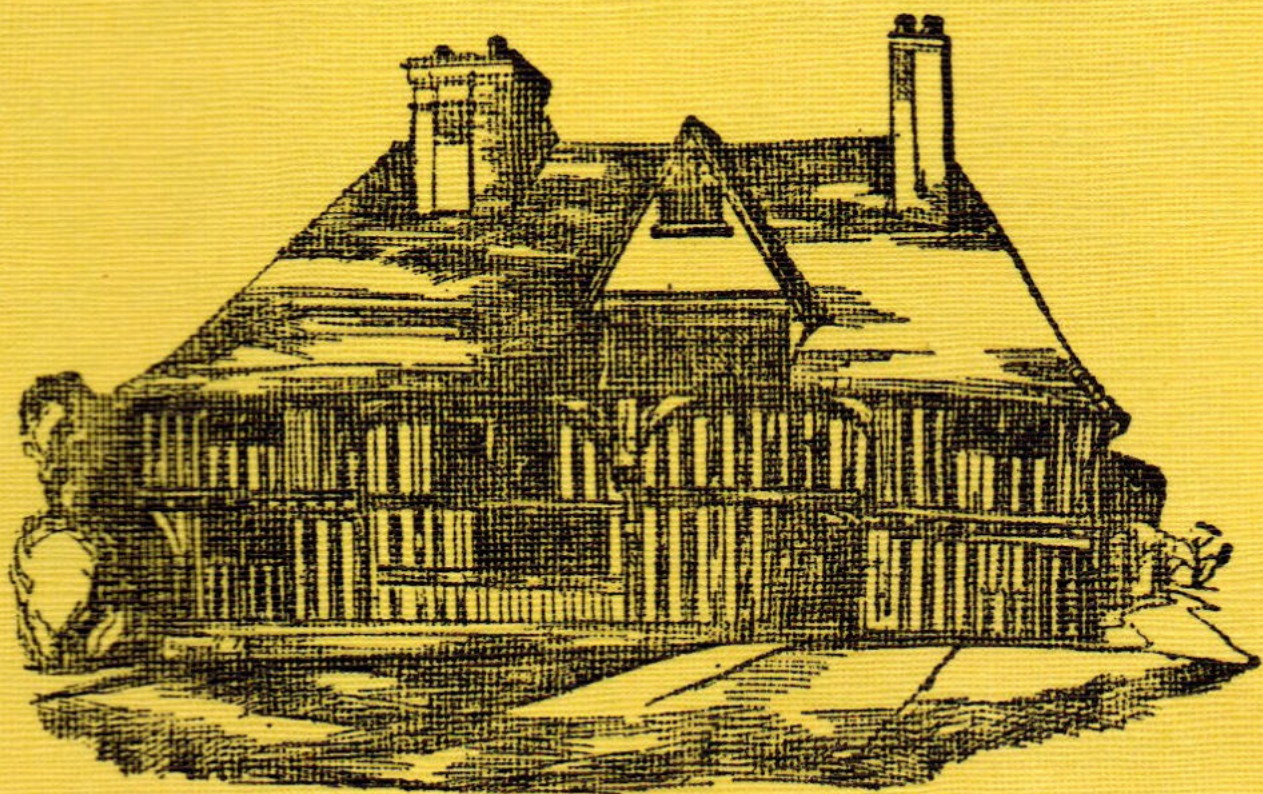


History Bookshelves

ELIZABETHAN HOUSES

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GINN

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Elizabethan houses and the things inside

SHAKESPEARE'S SCHOOL AND HOUSES LIKE IT

To see a house used in the reign of Elizabeth I, look at page 3. It is the grammar school where William Shakespeare learned Latin. (According to someone who knew him, he didn't learn much.) If you live near Stratford-on-Avon you can go to see that house, with the adjoining tower. If you live near some other old town you can perhaps see a house which is built in the same way. Many people lived in houses of that kind when Elizabeth I was queen, and now, in the reign of Elizabeth II, a number of them can still be seen. Some of those you will find are later copies of Tudor houses, but most of them are between 300 and 400 years old. In that long time they have often been repaired and some have had extra rooms added, or new windows. Some which were once private houses have been altered so that they can be used as museums. But if you can find houses which look rather like Shakespeare's school, you will know something about the homes of a great many Elizabethan children.

All the houses in which Elizabethan children lived were not built in Elizabeth's reign. People do not all live in new houses

now, and they did not then. (Perhaps you could find out how old the houses are in which the people you know live. It is, of course, rude to ask grown-up people how old they are, but most of them like to talk about the age of the house they live in, especially if it is very old or very new.) A number of houses used in Elizabeth's reign had been built in an earlier Tudor reign, perhaps in the time of her father, Henry VIII, or of her grandfather, Henry VII. (There is a list of Tudor rulers in *Ships and Seamen*.) The grammar school at Stratford-on-Avon was built earlier still, about sixty years before the reign of Henry VII began.

Of course, all Elizabethan children did not live in the same kind of house. Indeed, there was more difference between the kinds of house built in Tudor times than there is between the kinds of house built now. There were then no big housing estates on which a county council or a business firm puts up houses roughly all alike. There were none of the long, regular lines of streets with numbered buildings such as you see now in big towns. There were no blocks of flats.

Rich landowners built large houses in London or the country. Some of these houses had a number of rooms set, perhaps, round a quadrangle—an open square court—or even two. Many servants lived there, and grand visitors came to stay, bringing their



own servants with them. Poor working men lived in tiny cottages. Farm labourers, bellows menders, men employed in inns, for example, often had only two rooms in their house, one up, one down. In towns the poorest people might live in only one room, or perhaps in two, in someone else's house.

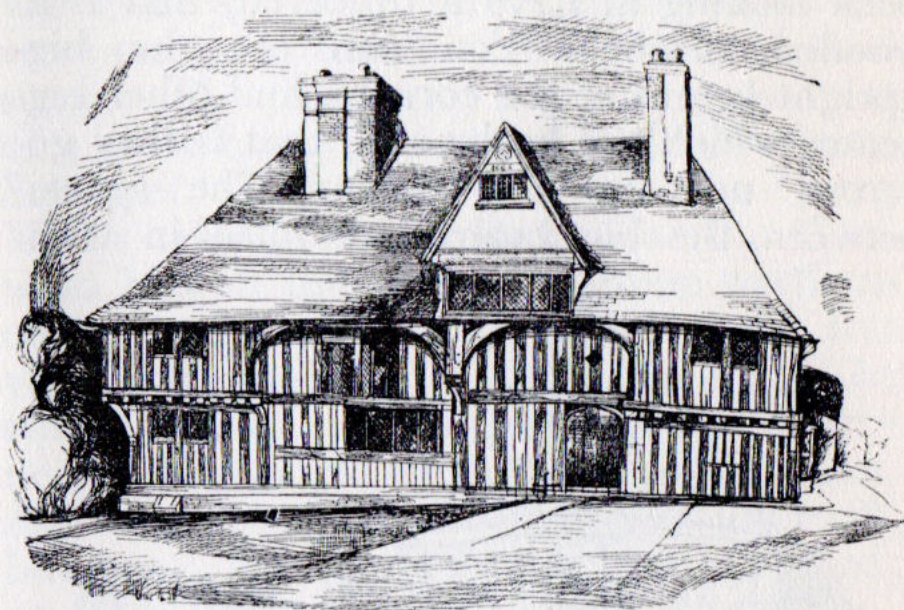
Houses built in the same kind of way as Shakespeare's school were the homes of middle-class people. The middle class included people who earned their living in a number of different ways, as it still does. The fathers of middle-class children might be landowners who did not possess a great deal of land and worked hard looking after



what they had; or farmers who rented their land and houses and barns; or lawyers; or schoolmasters; or merchants; shopkeepers; stone-masons; blacksmiths or weavers who employed other men to help them. On this page you can see a drawing of a house in

Gloucester. A bishop of Gloucester, Bishop Hooper, stayed there before his execution. He was burnt to death in Queen Mary's reign. (Look at *Bibles and Prayer-books*.)

Over the page is a picture of part of a building in Lavenham, Suffolk. It was put up by cloth merchants in the time of Henry VIII, when they wanted a good place where they could meet to do business.

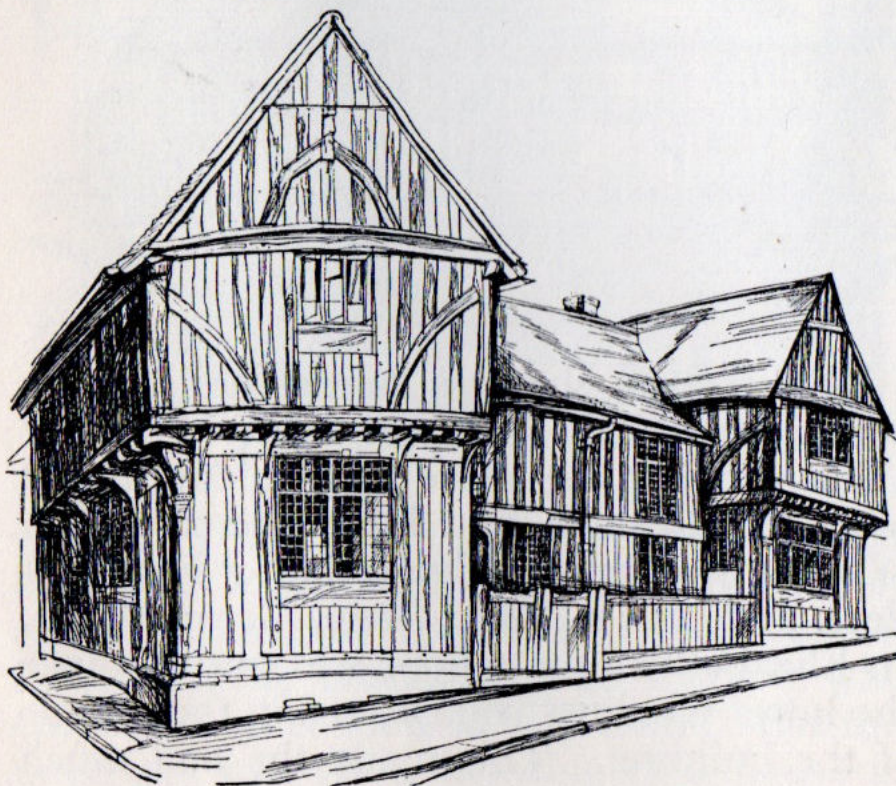


This picture shows a landowner's house in Otham, Kent. It was built in Henry VII's time, made more convenient in the reign of Elizabeth and later altered again. When it was new the house had a high hall (look at *Life in a Manor House*, Green Shelf). In Elizabeth's time a floor was put in above the lower windows you can see in the middle of the building. This made the hall much

lower, but there was space for rooms above it; you can see the two windows which were put in. After Elizabeth had died the gable, with its front shaped like a triangle, and new chimneys—those shown in the picture—were built.

BUILDING MATERIALS

All the houses in the pictures you have been looking at have a timbered, that is a wooden, frame. You can see the big upright beams at the corners, and other big beams which are horizontal, that is they go across, not up and down. The spaces between the big beams are filled in with

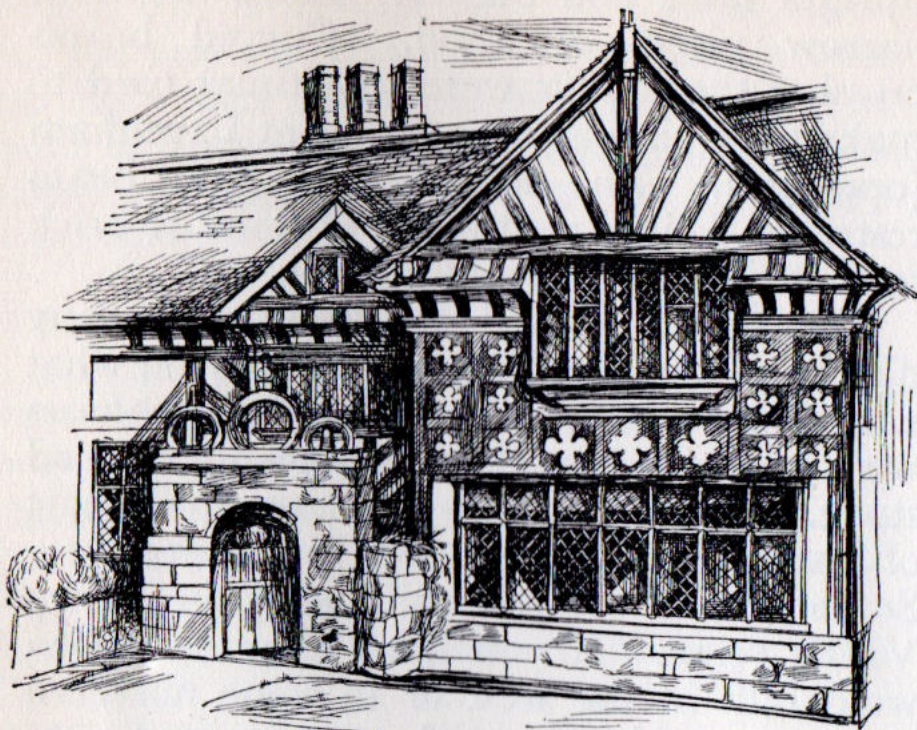


upright laths and plaster. Laths are thin, narrow pieces of wood. Curved beams crossing the plaster were sometimes used to make the building stronger, as at Lavenham (opposite). The lowest horizontal beam rested on a little wall made of stone or brick so that the wood should not rot.

The material used for building in any district of England depended partly on what was close at hand. Fewer timbered houses were put up where there was plenty of good stone. The picture on page 10 shows part of a stone house in a street in Glastonbury, Somerset. This was built early in Henry VIII's reign. If you lived near the Cotswold hills in the west or in some northern county your house, and even its roof, was very likely made of stone. Roofs might be covered with slates if there was a slate quarry near; more often with thatch or clay tiles. All those materials are still used for roofs, but very few new houses are thatched; can you think of some reasons why?

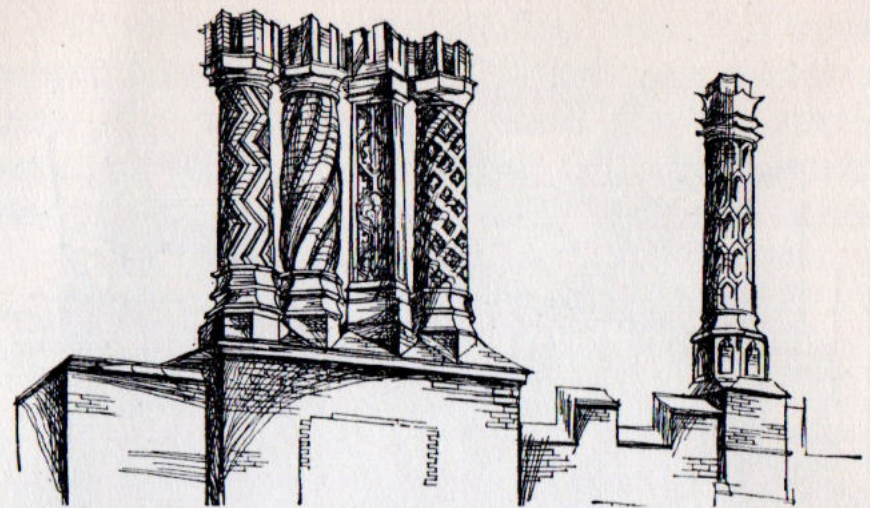
WHAT PEOPLE LIKED

The way in which a house was built depended partly, of course, on what people liked. Pretend you were born in a timbered house in Queen Mary's reign. When you were growing up your parents may have thought that they would like a new house. If you lived in the north, they might have

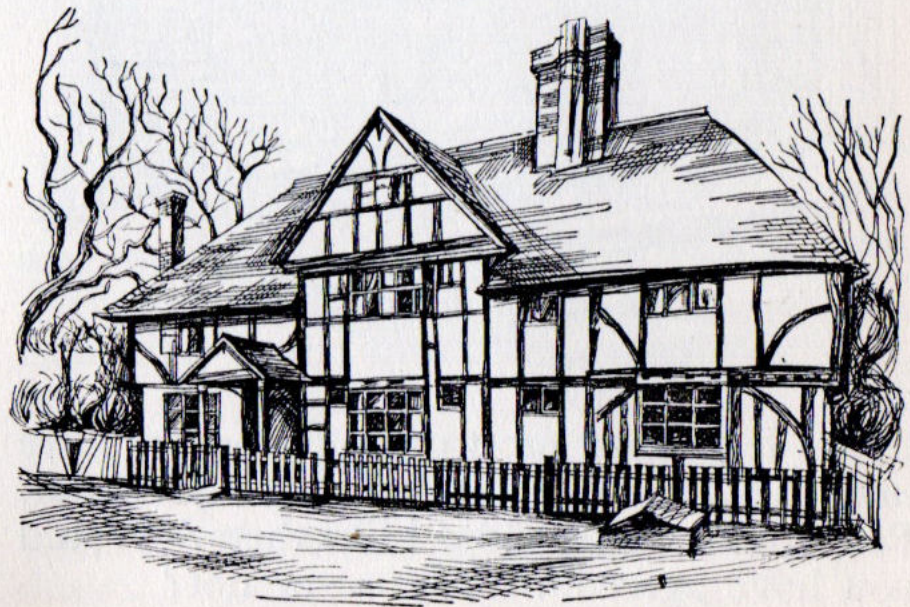


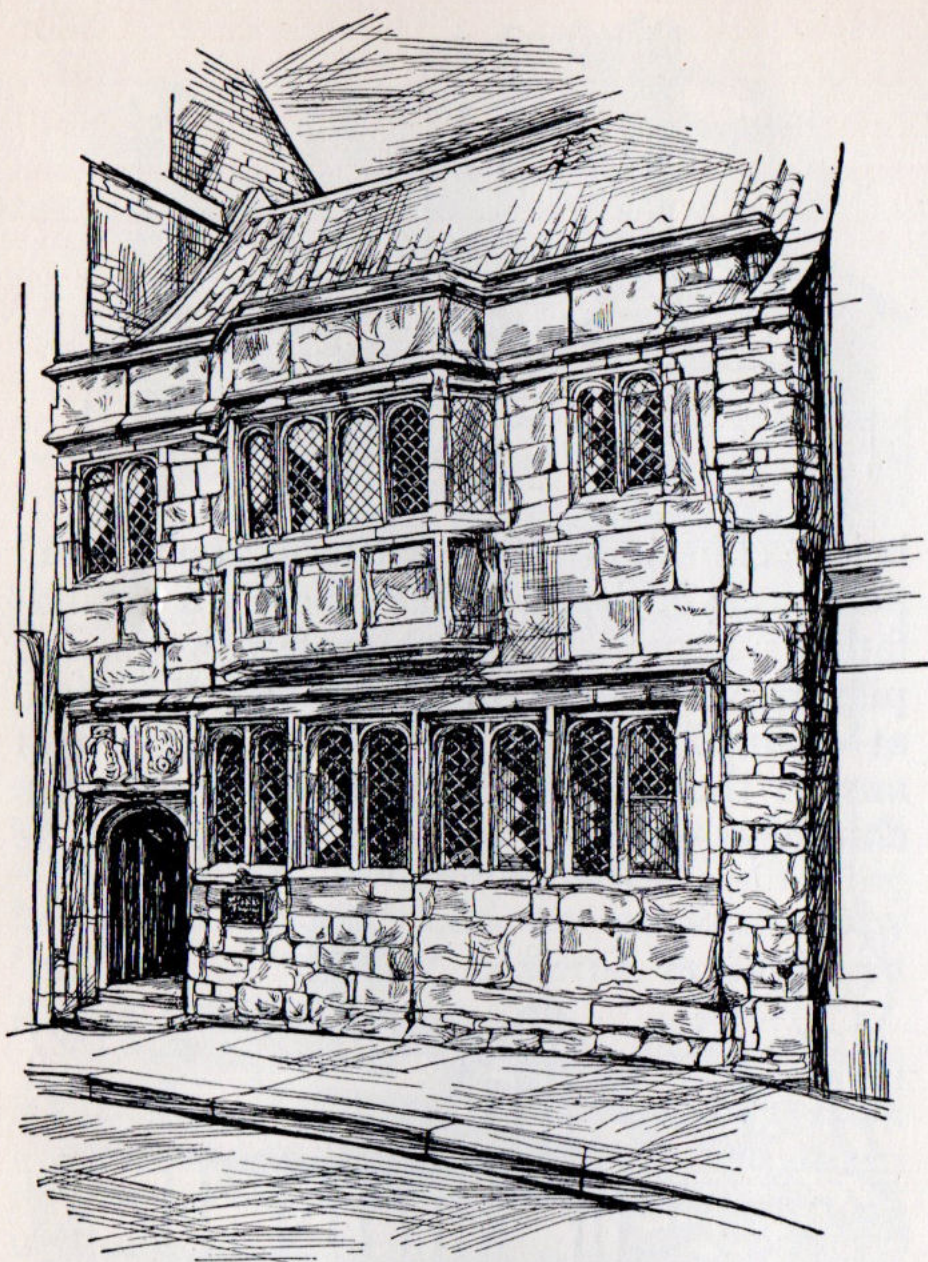
seen Speke Hall, in Lancashire, part of which is shown here. We cannot afford such a big house, perhaps they said, but we might copy the plan of making patterns in lath and plaster on a small one.

Or perhaps your parents still liked plain walls best. If so, your new house might have been built like the farmhouse in the bottom picture on the next page. (This was put up in Crundall, in Kent, about 1595.) Perhaps you were disappointed when you saw it, and said, 'It is just like our old one.' Then your parents pointed out to you the wider spaces between the laths. They told you, too, to look at the big brick chimney. 'I like tall



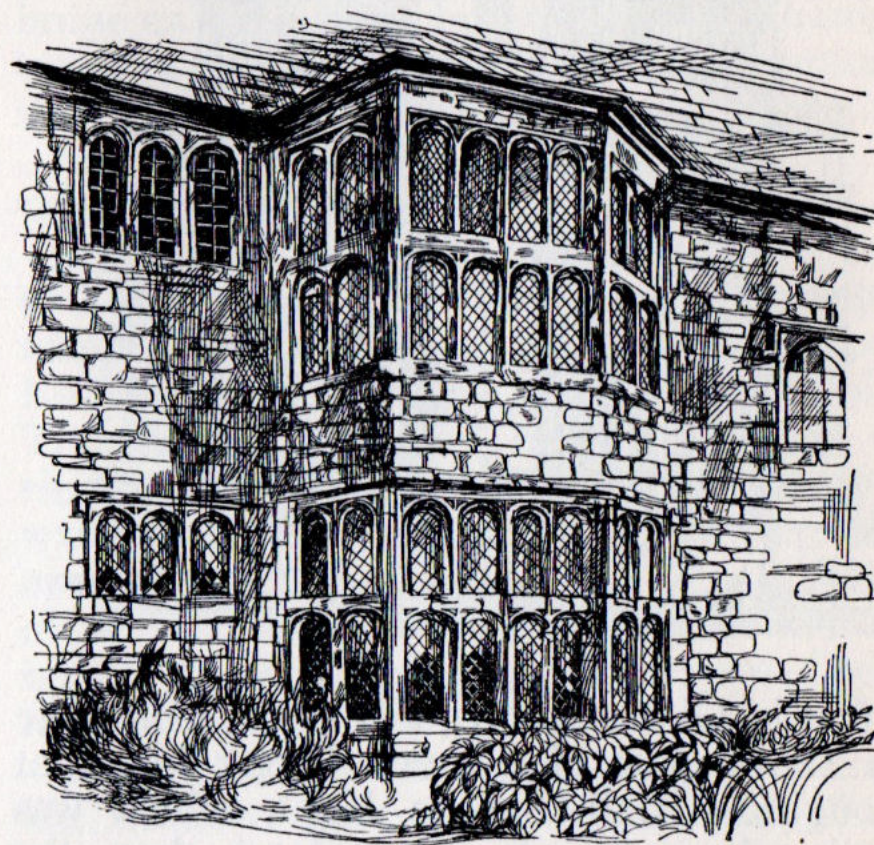
brick chimneys with patterns on them,' perhaps you said, 'like those in grandfather's house.' (The chimneys in the top picture were built in Henry VIII's reign, at Hampton Court.) Your father might answer that patterns were fashionable when chimneys were not often built, but now, he



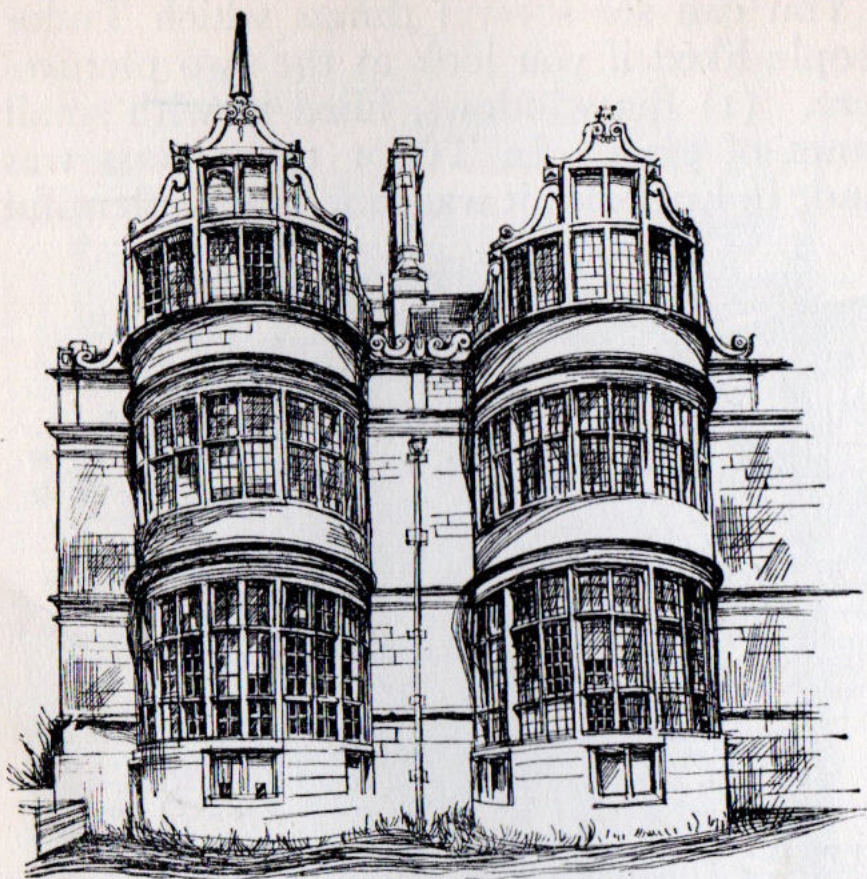


might say, when most ordinary houses have one, they are made plainer and more squat. Perhaps he might add, 'I like them.' Would you have agreed with him—or not?

You can see several things which Tudor people liked if you look at the two pictures here. (1) Big windows, filled in with small panes of glass. In Tudor times glass was made in England; it was much more plentiful



and cheaper than it had been earlier. (2) Flattened arches, set in a square frame. Look first at the tops of the small windows, below horizontal stone bars. Then look at the doorway in the picture on the left. (3) Bay windows which jutted out from the wall into the street or garden. The house drawn on page 10 is, you will remember, in a



street in Glastonbury. The picture on page 11 shows part of a much bigger house at Boughton Malherbe, in Kent, which was built about twenty years later than the Glastonbury house. The Glastonbury house is more like the one where you would probably have lived.

The rich man who built the house you see part of in the picture on this page liked big windows. Each of the little windows which together made up a big window is set in a square frame, like the little windows in

the Glastonbury house. But there are two differences between the bow windows here and the bay windows on pages 10, 11. Can you see what they are? Which do you like best? The bow windows are in a stone house called Kirby Hall, built in Northamptonshire in Elizabeth's reign. Northamptonshire is a county which has plenty of stone.

THE INSIDE OF HOUSES

The inside of an Elizabethan house was without many of the convenient arrangements which you have in your house, but Elizabethans felt they lived comfortably. There was no central heating, no gas or electricity for light or heat; no running water from taps or cisterns. There were big open fireplaces, home-made candles of tallow, or of wax for best (candles could also be bought); wooden tubs for baths in front of bedroom fires; water from wells; outside privies.

Rooms were often dark. It is true that big windows gave more light by day than people had had when glass was scarce and expensive. On the other hand, the stone uprights and cross-bars into which large panes were fitted took up much space. So, too, did the lead strips which held the small diamond-shaped panes commonly used in middle-class houses. Ceilings in such houses were low. They were crossed by beams which supported the floor of the room or loft

above. The spaces between the beams were filled with plaster.

Walls were sometimes panelled in wood. Sometimes they were covered with woven tapestry; or embroidered serge; or 'painted cloths', that is, pieces of canvas on which pictures in colours had been stained. The pictures were often of Bible stories, or of old stories about the Greek and Roman gods. Frames and portraits were hung only in very rich houses.

Floors were of wood or stone. In the better houses they were covered with straw or rushes, which helped to keep people's feet warm. Fresh rushes were put down in March, when the spring cleaning was done. The rooms were probably swept at other times too. If they had not been there would not have been many in which—as an Elizabethan writer put it—'no flea for his life dare abide to be known.' Soap was often made at home. For washing faces and hands, and for baths, it was scented.

BEDROOM FURNITURE

In the bedrooms there were, of course, no fitted basins. There was no washing-stand, no wardrobe or hanging cupboard, no chest of drawers, usually no dressing-table, no table or chairs. There were a few wooden stools which could be used as seats, or on which a candlestick could be put down. A

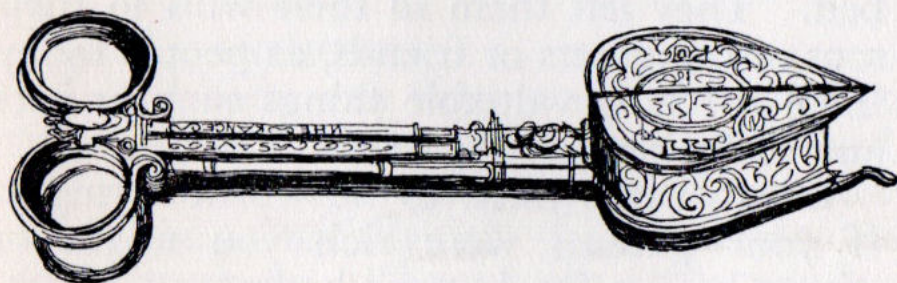
long chest, the top of which opened, was the place where clothes were kept. On the chest stood a basin and ewer (water jug) made of pewter or brass, and a looking glass—if the lady of the house was lucky enough to have one. Her combs, too, lay on the chest, and the little boxes in which she kept her powder and face-paint. A chest was a very useful piece of furniture.

The most important of all the things which stood in a bedroom was, naturally, the bed. In richer middle-class houses the bedstead was wooden and had a carved post at each of the four corners. The posts supported a flat piece of wood called a tester, which was like a roof to the bed. Round the sides of the tester were narrow pieces of wood carved with patterns. These formed a sort of wooden frill just below the tester, and from this 'frill' on three sides curtains hung to the ground. The bed had a high, carved wooden back which reached up to the tester. People thought a great deal of this kind of bed. They left them in their wills to their sons or daughters or friends, as people today leave specially valuable things such as cars and radio sets.

Elizabethans liked to be warm at night. If your parents were rich you might in winter have a fire in your bedroom. If not, you undressed quickly in the cold. Very likely you put on a dressing gown which you

called your nightgown, to keep you warm while you got ready for bed. Nightgowns in our sense were not used until nearly the end of Elizabeth's reign, and no one wore pyjamas. A boy, if he wore anything at all, might perhaps sleep in his shirt. A girl might keep on her 'smock,' that is, her chemise. Both men and women wore nightcaps.

At dark the windows of a house were all shut. Doctors said that night air should be kept out, especially from bedrooms. On the bedstead was a featherbed, or perhaps two. Under the featherbed there might be a thin straw mattress, and under that a criss-cross arrangement of ropes stretched from side to side of the bedstead. Elizabethans had soft feather pillows, linen sheets, woollen blankets and counterpanes which were often embroidered. When the candle had been put out and the bed-curtains drawn, forgetting the worries of the day, they slept. They could lie comfortably even on nights when



*Snuffers for putting out candles and cutting wicks.
This pair belonged to Edward VI.*

all around the wind doth blow . . .

And birds sit brooding in the snow.

Servants who lived in their master's house were warm, but they did not sleep in beds with a tester. They were provided with plain, low, wooden bedsteads and mattresses stuffed with flock. The children of the family often also had beds of this kind. They, too, slept soundly. A boy in a story, whose name was Guy, had to be called three or four times before he would get up in the morning. His mother said he ought to be 'anointed with the juice of birch'—whipped with a birch rod, she meant. She reminded him that he was nearly nine years old—at least, she said, eight and a half—and knew what he ought to do.

Poor men in cottages sometimes still lay on straw pallets (thin mattresses), or on rough mats made of plaited reeds, and put a round log under their heads as a pillow. Before Elizabeth's reign such a way of sleeping was common. Servants and cottagers, in earlier Tudor reigns, often had to lie without any sheet under them. Bits of the straw with which the pallet was stuffed used to work through its canvas cover and prick them. Some people had to be content without modern improvements.

UPSTAIRS ROOMS

The bedrooms in the houses of middle-class families opened one from another.

There was no landing with several rooms opening from it, no passage with doors on each or one side. The stairs might lead straight into a room, or there might be a little landing from which it opened.

In one of the further rooms you might find the nurse washing the baby. His mother was very particular that his ears and his eyes should be clean. If she saw the marks of tears on his cheeks she was troubled. The nurse had to put on his cap and his 'little petticoat,' his coat of shot silk, and his satin sleeves. Happily there was also a bib for him to wear, and a 'gathered apron with strings.' When he had been fed the nurse put him back in his wooden cradle, on a soft pillow. 'God send thee good rest, my little boykin,' his mother said as she left him. Perhaps she crossed the room and went out by the further door.

ROOMS ON THE GROUND FLOOR

On the ground floor, too, rooms often opened from each other. Some houses had big rooms which were used as halls had been before Tudor times. That is, they were dining rooms and living rooms. The entrance to such a hall might be by way of a passage at one end from which you would turn right, or left, into the hall. Or there might be a porch something like the porch of a church, built either in the middle of a long

side of the hall or (as church porches often are) towards one end of a long side. From the hall other rooms usually opened. In one of these the mother might sit with her needlework, thinking perhaps about the housekeeping or the new clothes her children needed. Another might be the children's room where they did their lessons.

In Norwich there is a comfortable, middle-class house of this kind. It has a musicians' gallery in the hall where men played while the family were at dinner, especially if there were visitors. *Elizabethan Playtime* shows the hall and tells about some of the musical instruments that might be used.

Some Elizabethan houses were arranged more as ours are. The halls were used chiefly as entrance halls, from which a dining room and other rooms opened. Sometimes the 'great chamber,' the pleasant room in which evenings were spent and guests were entertained after a meal, was on the first floor, especially in larger houses.

FURNITURE DOWNSTAIRS

Furniture in the homes of middle-class people was heavier and stronger than ours is. In richer houses a dinner table of oak with carved legs stood in the hall or the dining room. It was called a draw table because it could be made longer by drawing out a leaf or flap at each end. This was useful

when visitors came, as in towns they often did, to dinner or supper.

For meals a white cloth was put on the table, and at each place a spoon, a thick slice of bread, a napkin, and often a trencher

(wooden plate), were laid. These thin trenchers were used for fruit; they were kept in sets in a box. On one side a pattern and a rhyme, different for each trencher in a set, might be painted. There are pictures of fruit trenchers on page 8 of *Elizabethan Schools*.

In our time a girl whose mother asked her to set the table would certainly put a knife and fork and a glass for everyone. But in Elizabeth's reign it was still

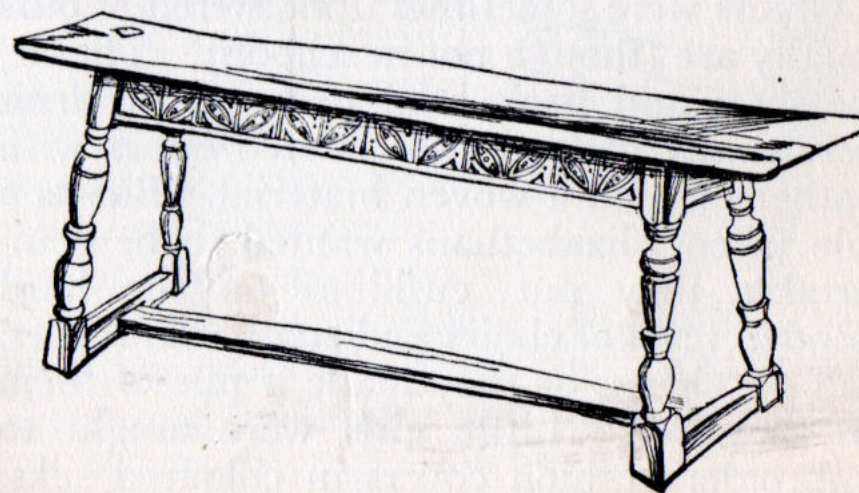
the custom for people at table to use their own knives. Forks were not brought to England until nearly the end of the reign, and at first they were used by very few people. As to glasses: these, and silver or pewter goblets for drinking from stood on a cupboard at the side of the room with metal flagons filled with wine and earthenware jugs of ale and

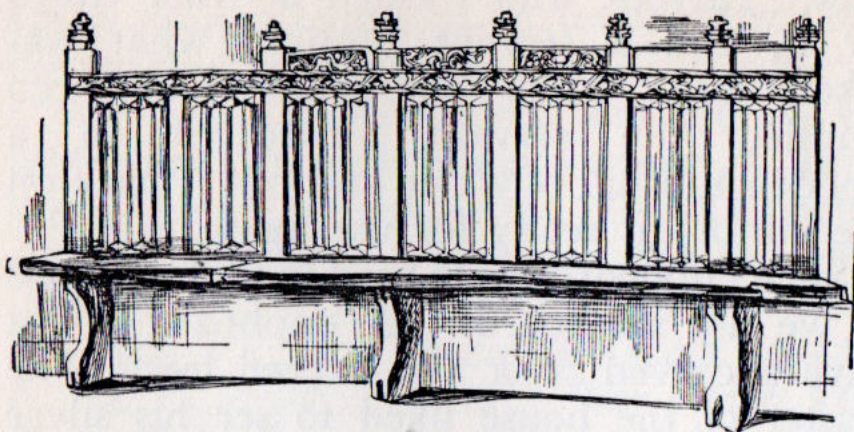


beer. Anyone who wanted a drink called for it, and a servant brought what was asked for. When the glass had been emptied the servant rinsed it in a wooden tub full of water and put it back on the cupboard ready for use again.

Such cupboards were used in dining rooms as we use sideboards. A cupboard might have a carved back and carved legs. The master of the house liked to see his silver flagons and cups and bowls standing there on well-polished wood. Carved cupboards and well-made tables were used also in other rooms. In poorer houses and in the homes of old-fashioned people meals were still served on trestle tables, and the family, especially the children, sat on plain benches.

Chairs were kept for the father and mother, and for their most important guests. In up-to-date houses less important visitors and





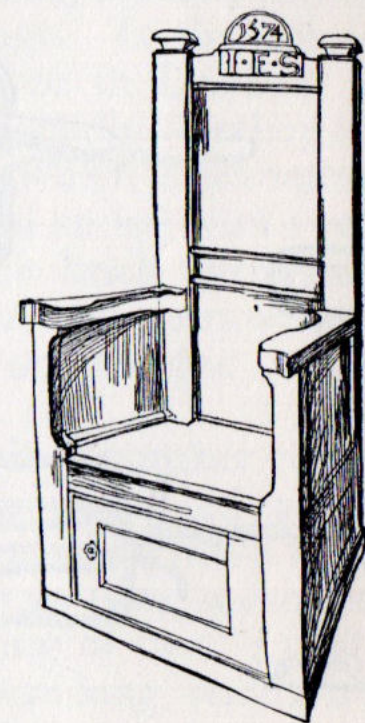
the rest of the family sat on stools, or on benches like the one in the picture on page 21. In sitting rooms chests were also used as seats. In less wealthy houses, and in inns, there were settles. A settle is a wooden chest, or bench, with a high back and, often, high ends. There is a picture of one on this page. Settles were convenient in rooms where leaded window panes fitted badly or the door had to be opened often.

Chairs were sometimes upholstered as ours usually are (though not in schools). That is, the seats and backs and perhaps the arms were thinly padded and covered either with leather or with a woven material. But as a rule when Elizabethans wanted to be comfortable they put cushions on the hard wooden seats of chairs and stools and settles, and on chests, or they made a pile of them on the floor. Little girls were taught to embroider cushion covers in coloured silks.

(*Girls at Home* tells more about this.) One old gentleman had a 'little quilt of linen cloth' made for his back—probably a small, thin, feather cushion or pillow covered plainly in linen. He was an invalid. We know about the things which belonged to him because a list of them which can still be read was written down on a roll of parchment.

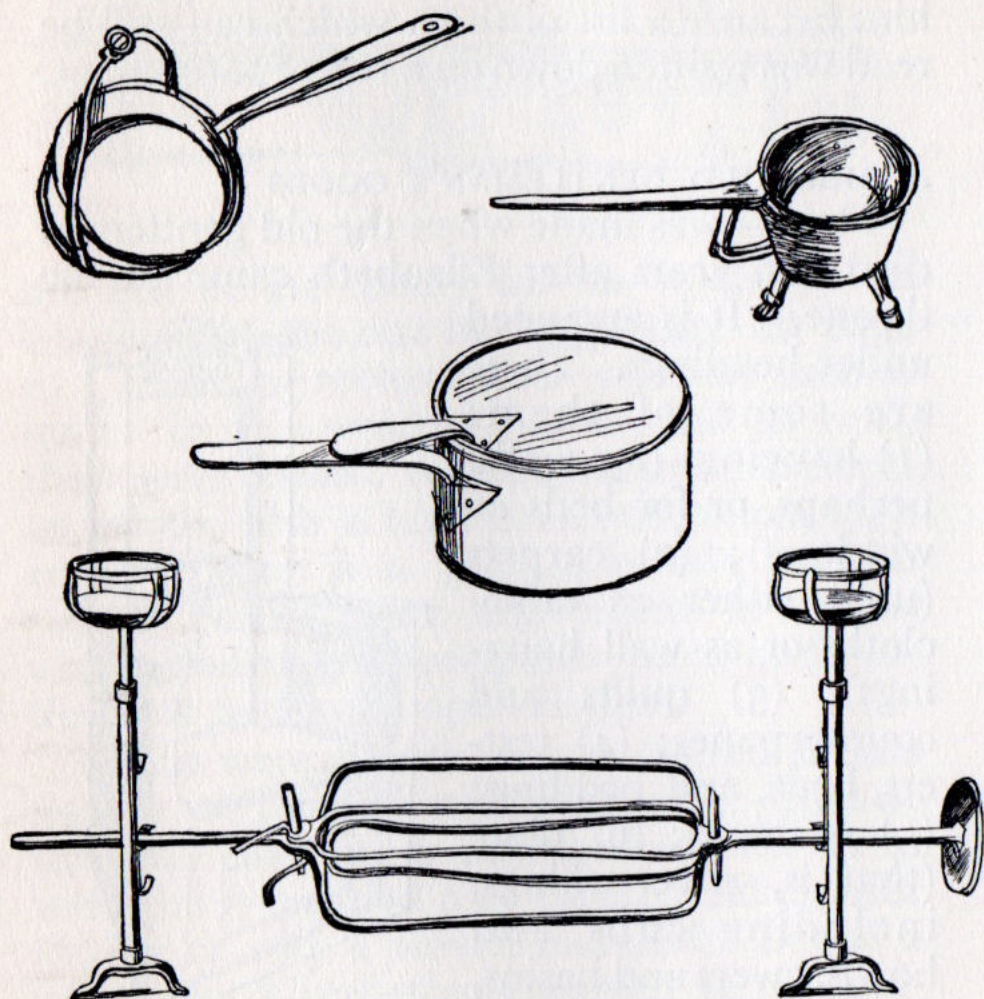
A RICH OLD GENTLEMAN'S GOODS

The list was made when the old gentleman died, ten years after Elizabeth came to the throne. It is arranged under headings. These are some of them: (1) hangings (for walls, perhaps, or for beds or windows); (2) carpets (used either as tablecloths or as wall hangings); (3) quilts and counterpanes; (4) testers, beds, and bedding; (5) cushions; (6) plate (that is, silver things, including cups and bowls, ewers and basins, flacons (for wine) and a toasting fork; (7) linen; (8) tables (one 'drawing table of walnut tree', and trestle tables) and cupboards and bedstocks (plain low bedsteads); (9) 'kitchen stuff'.



KITCHENS

The kitchen was, of course, a very important room in every house large enough to have one. It had a big open fireplace where



meat could be roasted or boiled. Elizabethans ate much more meat than we do. Roast beef, boiled salt beef, veal and mutton

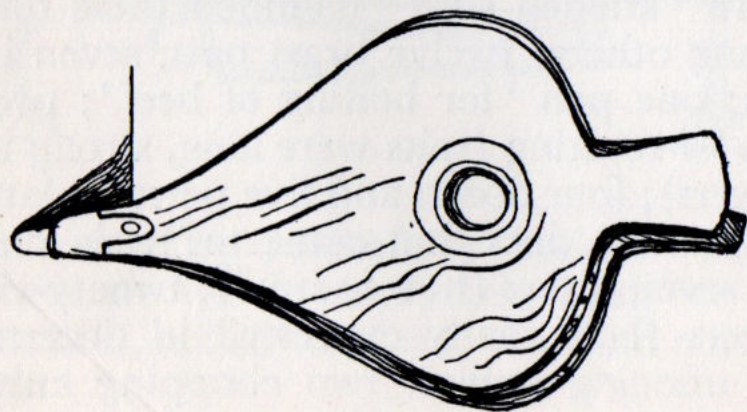
might, if there were visitors, be served at one meal, as well as fresh fish from rivers and ponds, and turkey and chicken. In the right seasons people enjoyed game—birds taken in sport, as is told in *Elizabethan Playtime*: pheasants, partridges, woodcock, quails. A great many dishes were served so that people might choose what they liked: no one was expected to have even a little of everything. Vegetables were eaten too: broad beans (not runner beans), green peas (a new luxury), onions, carrots, turnips, parsnips, spinach, cabbage. In the opinion of a Frenchman who lived in London, the English cooked cabbage badly; perhaps he preferred the raw salads which Elizabethans specially liked. The meal ended with sweets such as tarts (baked in a brick oven); and cheese; and fruit in season—strawberries or apples or apricots; or oranges, usually brought from Portugal.

To cook for such meals a number of pots and pans were needed. The old gentleman's 'kitchen stuff' included these things among others: twelve brass pots, seven iron pots; one pan 'for boiling of beef'; twelve spits for roasting (spits were long, strong iron skewers); four dozen and five pewter platters (how many does that come to?); six dozen and seven dishes (how many?); twenty-eight saucers (how many expressed in dozens?); two mincing knives; two chopping knives;

two frying pans; two dripping pans; two 'kymmells' (tubs) to salt beef in; a bread grater.

The old gentleman who had so many pewter dishes and plates lived in a big house near York, not far from his wife's old home. It does not now exist, but if you live near Kirkby Stephen, in Westmorland, you might see the big kitchen which he built in Henry VIII's reign. It is in Wharton Hall, his home when he was a boy.

In smaller houses, naturally, there was less 'kitchen stuff'. Very poor people might have one iron pot and a few plain trenchers. But kitchens in middle-class houses usually had a good number of things for daily cooking: pots, pewter platters, frying pans, spits. A spit was used for roasting a joint or bird. It was stuck through the meat and turned slowly in front of the fire, sometimes by a dog, often by a boy. The cook certainly had to work hard: nothing could be bought in tins or in packets neatly done up in grease-



proof paper. There were, of course, no electrical gadgets or mechanical contrivances such as a mincing machine. There were not even any matches.

In the country the ashes from a wood fire were usually kept hot from day to day. At night they were allowed to die down, but they could easily be blown up by bellows in the morning. If by mischance the fire went out, a flame could be got by striking a piece of iron on flint and allowing the spark to fall on something dry which would easily take light, such as tow, or fine shavings of wood. In towns this method might be more often used because of the danger of fires in the wrong places if ashes were kept hot. Coal was burnt in Elizabeth's reign (*Ships and Seamen* tells something about this), but wood was still the usual kind of house fuel.

CLOCKS AND WATCHES

Another thing which a modern cook would want but would not have found in an Elizabethan house is the kitchen clock. In middle-class houses and poor men's cottages there were no clocks at all. The tower of the church might perhaps have had one which struck the hour. In a very few rich houses a striking clock, made of brass, stood on a bracket. In such a house the owner might perhaps possess a watch. Watches were brought from Germany and France in



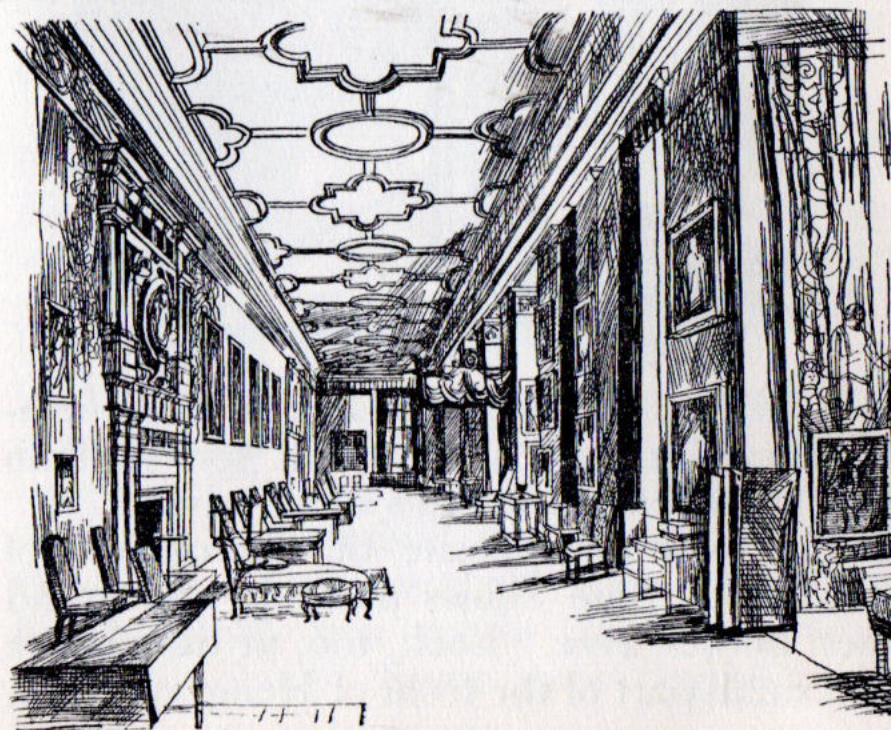
An unusual table clock made in Elizabethan England.

The clock shows the time of day on a circle of twice twelve hours, the date, and the time of high-tide in London.

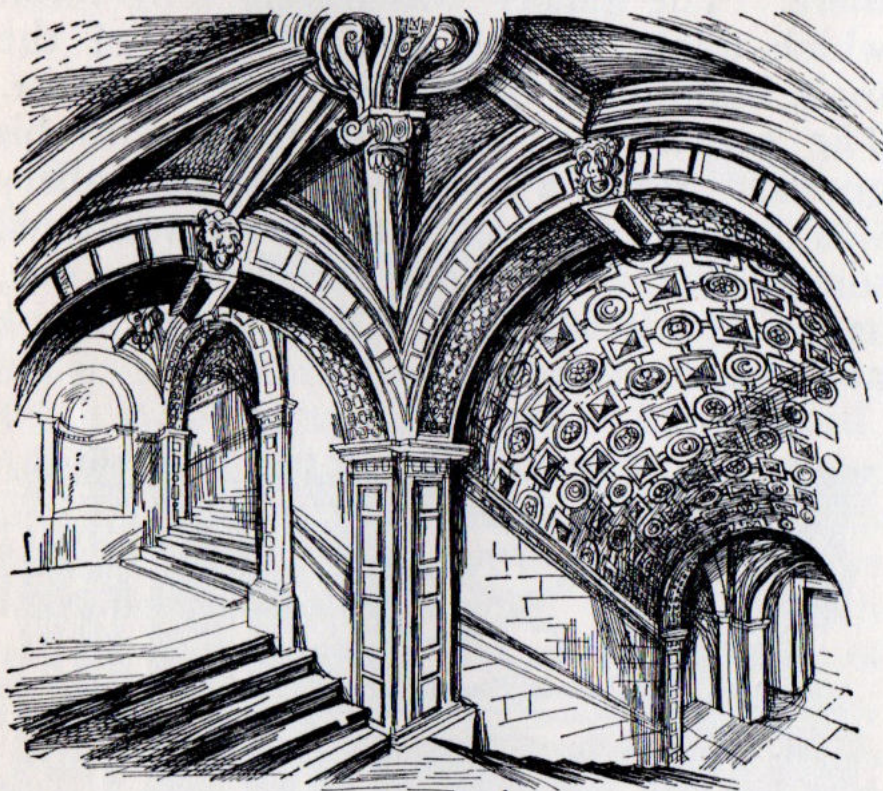
the early part of Elizabeth's reign, as in her father's. About twenty years before her death they began to be made in England. A very few had a lid which shut over the face, so that the watch could be carried in a pocket: a man in one of Shakespeare's plays 'drew a dial from his poke' (took a watch out of his pocket). But most watches of Elizabeth's time were in the shape of drums, round like the clock in this picture, or oval. They were about two inches across and between an inch and inch-and-a-half deep, and had no glass to protect the face. There was a hand to mark the hours, but no minute hand. These watches kept bad time. A rich man who owned one did not think of it as something for regular use; he treated it as a treasure to show his friends.

GREAT HOUSES

Rich landowners liked to fill their beautiful houses with treasures: silver cups, carved furniture, silk hangings, big portraits of themselves or their families. The portraits were usually hung in the gallery and some of the other treasures might also be kept there. The gallery was a very long room which might fill the whole length of the main building or of a wing of a great house. The owner liked to walk there with his guests. When a party was held the gallery was used for dancing. It had tall windows, sometimes on both sides, sometimes on one, as in Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire. Look at the picture.

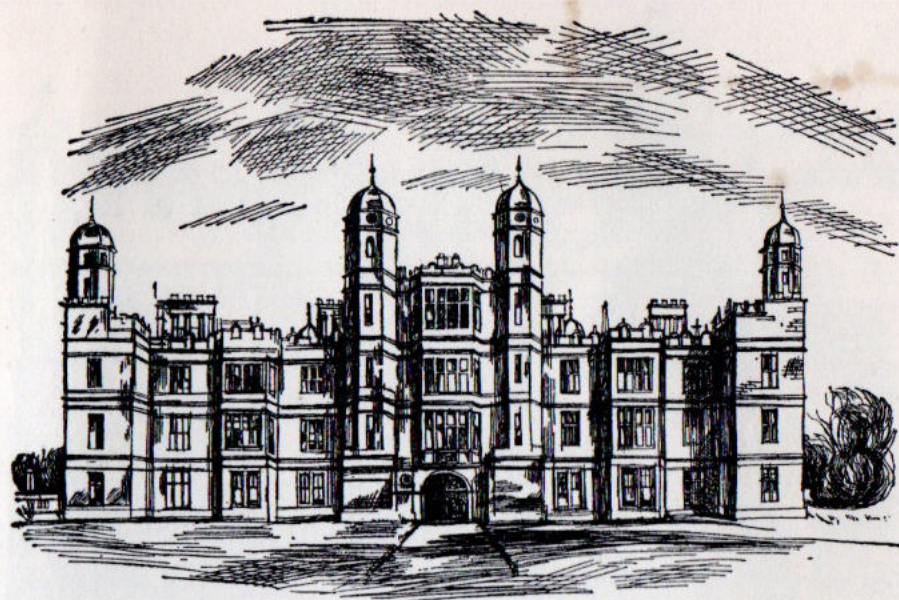


In the same picture, notice the pattern on the ceiling and the decoration over the fireplace. The chief rooms in great Elizabethan houses usually had patterns made in plaster on their ceilings, and carving in marble or wood over and at the sides of the fireplaces. This picture shows the pattern



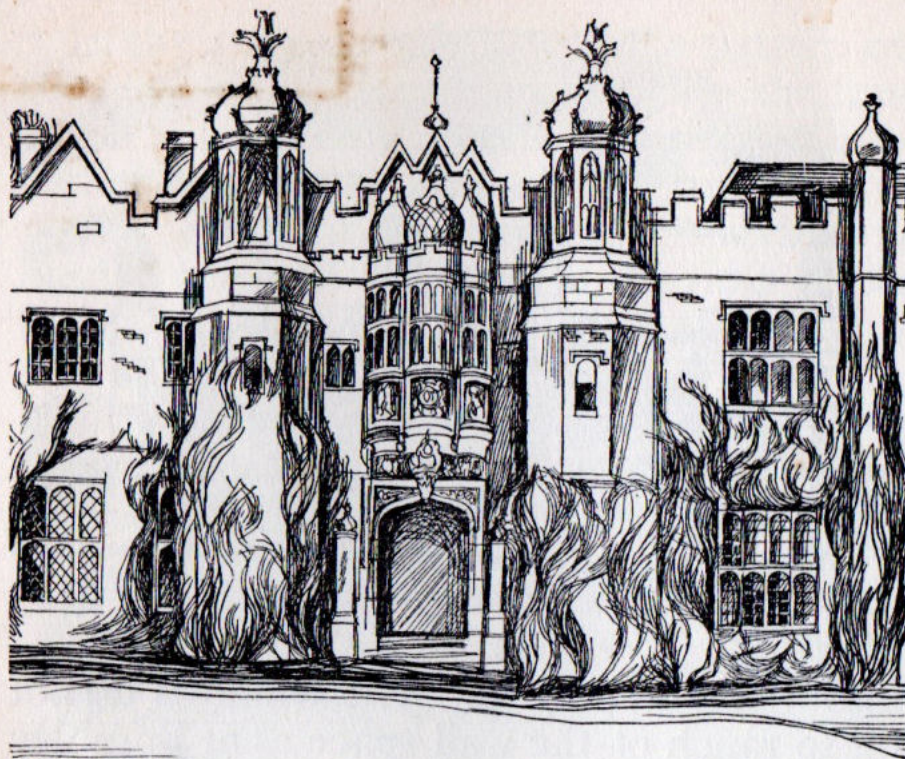
of a ceiling in Burghley House, in Northamptonshire, which was built for William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's chief adviser.

The picture opposite of the outside of Burghley House shows how big and grand such houses were. Look, too, at the picture of a small part of the front of Hengrave Hall,



in Suffolk, on page 32. The windows do not fill so much of the wall space as at Burghley House. Hengrave Hall was built earlier, in Henry VIII's reign. You will find more about that house in *Elizabethan Playtime*.

All the great houses shown in the pictures in this book, and many others built in Elizabeth's reign, are still standing. Some were lived in by one family—father, son, grandson, great-grandson and so on—for hundreds of years. Now many of them belong to the nation and are treated as museums or used for some other public purpose. In others the chief rooms are open to the public on certain days of the week. Perhaps there is one near your house which you might go to see when you are older. Some great houses were



not built until long after Elizabeth's time. Some were altered and added to in different reigns. If you ever go to see one of them you must ask someone to tell you what parts of the building and what furniture and other treasures inside it were made in the reign of Elizabeth I. Then you will know that the things you are looking at were perhaps seen by Shakespeare or Drake.

Things to do

1. Look for a house like Elizabethan houses. If you find one, draw one thing which makes you think it is Elizabethan. Compare your drawing with the pictures in your book.

2. Draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper. On one side of the line write 'Elizabeth I' as a heading, on the other side write 'Elizabeth II'. Under the first heading write the names of four things used in the time of Elizabeth I but not of Elizabeth II; under the second heading write the names of four things used in the time of Elizabeth II but not of Elizabeth I.

3. Find out in whose reign the houses your friends live in were built. (Most of them will have been built under Victoria (1837-1901); Edward VII (1901-1910); George V (1910-1936); George VI (1936-1952), or Elizabeth II (1952—).)

4. Make a picture of the outside of a house you would like to live in. Be careful about windows, chimneys, and the front door.

5. Make a book about houses and the things inside them in the time of Elizabeth II.

6. Go to any museum you can and ask if there are any things in it of the time of Elizabeth I. If there are, draw three of them.

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Edited by Catherine B. Firth

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